

# CIA and the Press: New Policy Is No Policy

## House Hearings on Collusion Become a Coverup—a Tough Inquiry Is Needed

BY DONALD KIRK

The statement-making is over, and the House subcommittee investigating the CIA and the press has let it be known that it does not intend to pursue the matter. An aide to Rep. Les Aspin, the "liberal" Wisconsin Democrat who chaired the hearings in January, quotes his boss as saying that they have made their point by giving editors and others the chance to comment publicly on the evils of CIA-press collusion.

What good would it do, Aspin reportedly wonders, to demand exposure of the names of individual American reporters and news organizations? He rejects comparisons between the hijinks of the FBI's Cointelpro program—under which the bureau nosed into radical groups at the behest of J. Edgar Hoover—and infiltration of the press by CIA operatives, who were often sophisticated zealots with a mission to make the world safe for American-style democracy.

But while Aspin appears altogether sincere in his reasoning, he unwittingly makes himself and his subcommittee of the House Intelligence Committee a party to a far-reaching coverup. For as long as neither the CIA nor American publishers are compelled to disclose past collusion and conflict of interest involving reporters, however deeply embedded in history, the CIA will continue to exploit this source of information.

What could appear more *pro forma* than the policy regulations, issued last December by CIA Director Stansfield Turner forbidding efforts to journalists from legitimate news organizations? Former CIA Director William J. Casey, it may be remembered, had once attempted to enhance the agency's credibility by admitting that the CIA was still calling on "free-lancers" and, of course, had no complaints about purchasing information from journalists working for "foreign" media. He has been roundly criticized for the admission. Turner's directive gives the appearance of answering some of the criticism of Colby by claiming that the CIA will no longer "enter into any relationships with full-time or part-time journalists (including so-called 'stringers') accredited by a U.S. news service, newspaper, periodical, radio or television network station, for the purpose of conducting any intelligence activities."

Yet free-lance "journalists" are often not easily accredited to anyone—they just submit articles hither and yon. Then, too, Turner's directive deliberately skips the question of foreign publications, many of whose reporters and editors might suit the CIA's purposes just splendidly—for not a few of these journalists are American citizens.

The CIA's new "policy," in short, is a non-policy that any imaginative or

directive all but invites journalistic super-patriots and opportunists to continue to assist the CIA, since it would "continue to permit unpaid relationships" with newsmen "who voluntarily maintain contact for the purpose of providing information."

Voluntary, indeed! One of the most familiar arguments for "cooperating" with the CIA is that reporters need to give in order to get. Actually, this argument is specious. Reporters generally can find more than enough—often more than do the unimaginative second-raters working for the CIA—by interviewing a wide spectrum of sources ranging from academics to government officials to opposition politicians. The reporter "owes" none of this material to anyone except his editors—and risks betraying sources by passing any of it along to the CIA or the State Department.

But should reporters, then, approach CIA people for information while offering nothing in return? Of course. In our "free" society the CIA owes taxpayers Americans whatever information it has, as long as it does not compromise its own legitimate function of gathering intelligence. There is no *quid pro quo*.

Naturally, certain journalists, under the guise of "exchanging" information with the

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agency, will ultimately begin working again for the CIA for money or other favors regardless of Turner's directive. In fact, the mere existence of the document provides a cover in itself, since unscrupulous CIA officials can now point to it as proof that the agency is, of course, not paying off newsmen—when they are doing just that.

Can anyone be so naive as to think that the CIA would not employ such subterfuge so long as it does not risk full exposure? The necessary rationalizations—for an agency that has overthrown governments, bribed politicians and financed newspapers and magazines—are a matter of routine.

The chances of abuse of the public trust by the CIA would be significantly reduced, however, if congressional investigators had the courage and foresight to pillory in public the reporters and editors who already have compromised their professional integrity by hiring themselves out to the government in this fashion.

Every correspondent knows of journalists whose sources of income have been questionable—who somehow seemed to live comfortably and enjoy unusual access to American officials abroad, even though they wrote only a

The actual names of reporters and organizations involved go far beyond those already mentioned in congressional testimony and newspaper articles. News stories, for instance, have tended either to exaggerate aimlessly (as in the case of Carl Bernstein's lengthy piece for Rolling Stone magazine), or to be extremely circumspect. Probably a congressional investigation is the only way to extract the real story on the press and the CIA, since individual reporters do not have the power to question CIA bureaucrats under oath, much less to demand to see their records.

And only the revelation of the full CIA-press story can prevent a repetition, for the worst journalist offenders have a way of avoiding exposure by fading out of journalism, or brazenly denying any CIA past.

One Washington columnist, in what was clearly an unguarded moment, once boasted to me that he had, for "a lot of money," done a report on Soviet photography for the U.S. Information Agency. Since USIA does not ordinarily trumpet the achievements of the Soviet Union, the report could only have been used to serve some aim of American intelligence. More shocking, his editors blandly condoned his conduct as long as it remained unpublished, but responded with panic at the first inkling that others might have been on to their man's secret. One of these editors, with no fear of cross-questioning, later testified righteously before the Aspin subcommittee.

The question, then, is who is more hypocritical: the CIA, for setting guidelines that it can easily flout, or editors, for hiding skeletons in their closets? For that matter, is Aspin himself wary of pressing an inquiry that might turn some of these same editors against him and whatever higher ambitions he may have?

So far, Aspin has merely provided a forum in which editors and others can limit the discussion to vague generalities. Now he should begin the questioning in earnest. How much and by whom were what reporters paid for "free-lance" efforts for the government? How much did their editors know—and what about the editors' own long-standing relationships in high places?

Only by asking tough, specific questions—and getting answers in the glare of publicity, and in the fear of trial for perjury—can we have the slightest assurance that journalists will not continue to collude with government officials.

Obviously, it would be naive to think that such scrutiny would totally eliminate CIA-press collaboration. But, like exposes of other offenses against American democratic principles, it would discourage would-be offenders and define much more clearly than statement-making and "guidelines" the difference between